

ARMED FORCES RADIO BEGINS TELEVISION SERVICE

MATS put a station on the air at Keflavik, Iceland, on March 1, 1955. It put another on-the-air at Kindley AFB, Bermuda, four months later. In doing so, it became the first Air Force command to bring television to all its remote bases. Television continued to expand. The U. S. Air Force added a station at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. (The latter was very important during the Persian Gulf War of 1991.) In July, the Air Force organized the first and only Radio and Television Squadron in the Armed Forces at Headquarters USAF, Wiesbaden, Germany. The 7122nd Support Squadron (AFRS-TV) initially supervised five radio stations and the TV stations at Wheeler Field and Dhahran. It planned to expand the television operation to eleven bases.

While the Squadron had supervisory control over the stations, a true network never evolved. Each outlet operated independently. The Squadron's stations in Germany at Ramstein, Spangdahlem, Bitburg and at Landstuhl did not compete with AFN. Because AFN made no effort to add television to its operation until the mid-1970s. The Squadron's primary job was supplying each outlet with kinescopes of the top entertainment shows. The commercial networks supplied programming to the Air Force free of charge. Resource limitations at each station allowed only news, weather, sports, personality interviews and the chaplain's half-hour on Sundays to be locally produced.

From the beginning, the Air Force in Europe faced a problem in selecting and training personnel to man the television stations. The Air Force had no Specialty Code (job description) for television personnel. So, the Squadron recruited radar and radio specialists to man its operations. On occasion, they'd find personnel who had civilian television experience from bases throughout USAF. With the help of the Video Production Squadron, the 7122nd established a training program at Wheeler Field. There, technicians became certified as qualified in TV maintenance or production.

To provide guidance for its TV operations, the Office of Armed Forces Information and Education published a set of procedures for establishing or shutting down television outlets. The size of the potential audience was not to determine whether a base should have a station. Instead, a commander had to justify the need for a station

in his area. According to DoD Instruction 5120.2, an outlet could be established "in commands where English language television facilities are nonexistent or are inadequate."

The local commander had to estimate the number of personnel that'd benefit from the facility. He'd also assign the local unit that would exercise control. He'd determine its physical location, personnel requirements and budgetary support. The request also had to show the availability of a television frequency in the area and the status of negotiations for its use with the host government. The proposed outlet was not to interfere with domestic or foreign stations and was not to restrict or preclude use of any frequency by a licensed station. Finally, the station was not to compete for U.S. military listeners in the area. Some of these restrictions still hold true today.

Television finally came to network level operations when AFKN began to broadcast filmed shows in Seoul on September 15, 1957. Live programming began on January 4, 1959. The first outlet opened on March 1 at Camp Kaiser and had only a film broadcast capacity. So did later ones at Kunsan Air Base, which began operation in July, 1963, and at Taegu, which went on the air that Christmas.

In 1964, the Seoul station consolidated its broadcast operations. It moved its TV transmitter from Namsan Hill to Hill 343 in the Yongsan Compound. Then it combined radio and television facilities in the one location. During the year, AFKN-TV improved its picture quality by replacing its old cameras with modern Image-Orthicon cameras and improving the studio lighting system. AFKN also began plans to link all the outlet television stations with the network headquarters by microwave.

By the end of '65, Seoul could originate all programming in a true network style. Through a complex of microwave relays and strategically-placed repeater transmitters, they reached as far south as Taegu. The next year, they completed the link to Pusan. For coverage outside the studios, AFKN built a mobile van. They used it to broadcast such events as Bob Hope's Christmas show, sports events, military ceremonies, USO shows and chapel services. This provided AFKN with more of a "feel" of commercial radio and television. In addition, AFKN-TV became the first affiliate of AFRTS to receive a video tape recorder for studio operation.

During the year, the network put the van to good use, covering a meeting of the Military Armistice Commission at Panmunjom. Through a window, an AFKN camera recorded an angry exchange between the two sides while Communist guards looked on. Then, in October, the network geared up to cover President Johnson's visit to Korea. AFKN Radio and TV covered President and Mrs. Johnson at virtually every location of their visit by staying

on the air 34 of the 44 hours of their stay. Such efforts brought American Heritage Foundation awards to Radio Vagabond. It won as the Best Military Radio Station In The World For 1966. AFKN-TV won as the Best Military Television Station For 1967.

The next year saw further improvement in AFKN's news coverage capability with the inception in January of the AFRTS voice circuit connecting Seoul to Washington. This allowed instantaneous coverage of news and sports. Within two hours of going on-line, the Armed Forces in Korea were able to hear President Johnson's 1967 State Of The Union Address. The network also covered Vice President Humphrey's visit to the inauguration of Korean President Park Chung Hee later in the year.

POOL COVERAGE OF THE PUEBLO INCIDENT

The network gave full coverage to the North Korean capture of the *USS Pueblo*. The network began to report on the story from the moment the North Koreans seized the surveillance ship off the coast on January 23, 1968. It ran for almost a year.

From the beginning of negotiations for the release of the ship's crew, AFKN assumed a key role in reporting the story. Panmunjom's relative isolation, its position within the Demilitarized Zone and its controlled access routes dictated that AFKN provide the radio and television pool coverage for Western networks.

The network began to work directly with the 8th Army Public Affairs Office in planning media coverage of the crew release whenever it occurred. They made arrangements for broadcast circuits from key locations in Korea. They prepared for live radio transmissions back to Washington. A special plane would fly videotapes of the release to Japan. There they would transmit them via satellite to the United States and the rest of the world. AFKN also secured permission to broadcast all proceedings live on radio. They pre-planned to duplicate the videotape so that AFKN viewers throughout the Korean peninsula could see the event within two to four hours of its occurrence.

In the fall, they rebuilt the mobile TV van and installed new equipment to broadcast the release of the *Pueblo* crew whenever it occurred. They also would use it to cover Bob Hope's Christmas Show. During the several months of delicate negotiations, military authorities did not permit any test runs nor even a check of broadcast lines to the northern areas. They feared that rumors could start and spread.

The network broadcast the Bob Hope Special live on both radio and television. However, another broadcast would overshadow the two-and-a-half-hour show just two days later.

On Saturday morning, December 21, the network received word that the possibility of a release seemed real. That night the PAO passed official word that the release would take place on Monday. The next morning, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Tennant, Jr., AFKN's Commander since August, called together the 50 staffers who were to be involved with the radio and television coverage. After going over the changes in ground rules, they made final revisions in the plans. They reviewed the timetable and confirmed assignments. They loaded the TV van, the radio van, the lighting truck and a special bus. Then, shortly after noon, twenty-seven AFKN men headed north over roads made icy by a two-inch snowfall. After arriving at Panmunjom early in the evening, they set up the equipment. By daylight, everything was in place.

AFKN Radio began its five-and-a-half hour broadcast at 9:00 AM with the signing of the formal document - the so-called "apology." It continued its coverage while the North Koreans delayed the actual release from 11:00 am to 11:30. It broadcast the press conference of Major General Gilbert Woodward, the chief negotiator. There, he explained the contents of the document and a second one in which the United States promptly repudiated the "apology."

Up to the actual release, the television crews taped background shots and prepared for the arrival of the *Pueblo's* crew at the Bridge of No Return. Both radio and television reported the exchange live as the eighty-two men left captivity. AFKN followed with coverage of the crew's first hours of freedom. It also broadcast the press conference at which the ship's Captain, Commander Lloyd Bucher, described the ordeal that he and his men had endured.

The network wrapped up the five-hours of coverage with a summary of the day's events. A jet flew to Japan with the videotapes for broadcast to the world. Meanwhile, the staff helicoptered the backup videotapes and film to Seoul. There, they edited them. The story broadcast that evening on the late news. AFKN concluded its coverage with the departure of the crew the next day from Kimpo Air Base.(1)

The planning and preparations paid off! The network covered every scheduled event with no misses, breakdowns or glitches. The success with which AFKN handled the *Pueblo* story made their radio and television operations a proud model for all of AFRTS!

Upkeep of AFKN physical facilities was difficult. In the late 1970s, President Carter proposed withdrawing all American Forces from South Korea. That drastically reduced AFKN's budget. Even basic repairs couldn't be made. Only after President Reagan's decision to keep United States troops in Korea was the network able to replace worn out equipment and modernize its facilities.

FEN IN TRANSITION

Despite receiving less support than other AFRTS networks, AFKN did have the advantage of providing service to a compact geographical area. The Far East Network was not so lucky. In November, 1953, it moved from Tokyo to new headquarters at South Camp Drake. Yet, FEN had to maintain and supervise outlets as far away as Guam and Taiwan. Over the years, the FEN staff seemed to be dealing more with changes in administration than with operations. These included of internal reorganizations, changes in jurisdictional control, and the opening or closing of various stations. Nonetheless, they covered such major stories as presidential visits, attempted coups and military exercises.

The Far East Network reached its peak of 20 outlets in 1954. In December, FEN Clark in the Philippines became the second network station to maintain a 24-hour AM radio operation. It followed the lead of the headquarters station, which began 'round-the-clock broadcasting shortly after the move to Camp Drake. The next November, Clark became the first FEN outlet to add television broadcasts. The Okinawa station became the second outlet to have television when it went on the air in December 1955.

By 1956, FEN began to shrink as U.S. military facilities in Japan experienced a phase-down period. Between 1956 and 1958, it deactivated, relocated or modified several stations into merely relay transmitters. In January, 1958, for example, FEN Sendai and its nearby relay transmitter ceased operation. Its equipment moved to Misawa Air Base where a new station went on the air the same month. FEN suffered a further reduction in March, 1959, when the Air Force transferred the Okinawa facility to the Commander on the island. AFRTS Okinawa then became an independent station. Administrative changes continued the next year. Finally, operation control transferred from the Army to the Air Force. The 5th Air Force headquarters in Japan assumed command responsibility.

Armed Forces Television finally reached the Japanese mainland Christmas Eve, 1960, when the Misawa television station went on the air. The new facility was the first UHF transmitter in Japan. AFRTS broadcasted on UHF so that the station would not compete with Japan's commercial VHF television operations. In 1962, FEN put television on the air at Chitosa and in early '63 at Wakkanai, using a closed circuit format to satisfy the Japanese requirements.

The early 1960s also marked the beginning of a series of reorganizations that changed the chain of command but effected little change within the FEN operation. In 1962, the Air Force formed the 6120th Broadcasting Squadron and placed FEN under its jurisdiction. In July, 1965, they

transferred FEN Clark from the network to the control of the local Air Force commander. The station became the headquarters of a new three-station AFRTS network in the Philippines. Together with Subic Bay and San Miguel, the Armed Forces Philippine Network (AFPN) was born. In July, 1971, the Air Force established the 6204th Broadcasting Squadron (BRS) at Clark and placed AFPN under its control. The next year when the United States returned Okinawa to Japanese control, AFRTS transferred Okinawa back to FEN and it once again became FEN, Okinawa.

A major reorganization of AFPN occurred in November, 1974. The 6001st Aerospace Support Squadron (AEROSS) in Thailand merged with the 6204th BRS. The new 6204th AEROSS controlled all AFRTS stations in the Philippines, in Thailand and on the island of Taiwan, rivalling FEN in size. However, in 1976, the 6204th AEROSS, then reduced to only the Philippine stations, merged with the 6120th Broadcast Squadron, which controlled FEN. The new 6204th Broadcasting Squadron assumed control of all stations in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. Thus, it became one of the largest military networks in the world.

Within all these mergers, another major reorganization took place. The FEN Clark station became headquarters for Detachment 1 of the 6204th BRS and FEN Okinawa became Detachment 2. Misawa joined the Japanese network, which included the headquarters station serving the Kanto Plain area around Tokyo, Iwakuni, and Sasebo.

In 1978, FEN Headquarters and FEN Tokyo radio moved from their longtime base at South Camp Drake into new, modern studios on Yokota Air Base. Television came to U.S. forces scattered throughout the Kanto Plain when KPTM, Channel 11, signed on the air late that year. Because of Japanese restrictions, the television operation required a closed circuit cable operation on each base with the programming sent out from headquarters via microwave.

Television did not reach all American forces in Europe until the late 1970s. Unlike the Far East, especially Korea, and the many remote bases that provided little in the way of outside entertainment, U.S. soldiers in Europe could usually find lots of things to do during their off time. The European Command expressed reluctance in establishing television one base at a time, arguing that when it came, it should be available everywhere at once. However, the Command simply didn't have the amount of money needed to execute such a major project. AFN's own senior civilian staff had no experience in television. So, they'd just as soon allow the Air Force to continue control of the medium.

AFRTS' IMPACT ON SHADOW AUDIENCES

Whatever the reasons, during the 50s, 60s and far into the 70s, AFN continued to operate only as a radio net-

work. While its primary audience remained the U.S. forces stationed across West Germany and in West Berlin, AFN soon created a "shadow" audience of significant size.

Officially, the Army ignored AFN's German and other European listeners for two compelling reasons. First, control of AFN remained in the hands of the Army commanders who wanted to maintain the network strictly as a morale and information tool for their commands. Any attempt to exploit the shadow audience might affect the network's credibility and alienate the soldiers. Second, the AFRTS programming from commercial networks was to be used only to provide entertainment to the troops, without advertisements or any form of political messages.

Even without any conscious effort to attract the foreign audience, AFN probably enjoyed a regular, German and European listening population greater than the size of its primary audience. This continued into the 1960s, even after more and more European stations returned to the airwaves. Whatever the actual numbers involved, AFN had a real impact on its civilian audience, affecting mostly their musical tastes. In a 1956 article, *Variety* observed, "It's no exaggeration to say that AFN stations are mostly to blame for the Germans' strong predilection for American music." Four years later, *Billboard* commented, "It is AFN's tremendous European audience that created the trans-Atlantic market for American music. There is scant doubt on the score."⁽²⁾ (Their pun, not ours.)

In England, during the war, AFN influenced British listening habits even though the many radio stations scattered on Army bases had a limited range. Even after the war, AFN reached audiences on the British Isles since AFN Frankfurt could be heard readily in England at night. The American programming offered a lively alternative to the more conservative programming of the BBC. A 1964 USIA survey found that eighteen percent of a random sample of Britons reported listening to AFN. That's quite an impact!⁽³⁾

In the broader perspective, AFN undoubtedly had a more profound impact on Western Europeans than just on their culture. AFN programs provided a credible picture of life in the United States. The Europeans believed it because of the absence of propaganda that typified Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. If the network's outlets could carry news stories critical of the nation's political leaders, stories of corruption, of tragedy - in other words, the same information heard back home on civilian radio - the European listeners could conclude that the programs reflected the "real" America.

However valuable this benefit proved to be, AFN's only stated purpose was to supply news, information and entertainment to its military audience. During the '50s and '60s, it continued to build on the reputation it had

earned from its coverage of the constantly covering the Nuremberg War Crime Trials and the Berlin Blockade. AFN newsmen constantly covered live events. These included the formation of the West German Government, the East Berlin riots of 1953, the construction of the Berlin Wall and President John F. Kennedy's famous "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech in 1961.

AFN declined in size during the late 1940s as American Forces left Europe. After the formation of NATO and the increase in troops on the continent, it would begin to grow again. AFN Nuremberg went on the air in 1950. AFN Kaiserslautern began broadcasting from a van in an open field in February, 1953, before moving into a permanent home in April, 1954. With NATO headquarters located in France and so many American military personnel stationed there, AFN started negotiations with the French government to begin broadcasting. The discussions dragged on as French governments came and went in the pre-de Gaulle days. It was not until 1959 that AFN once again broadcast on French soil. They did so using small 50-watt FM transmitters at most bases and relaying programs from three studios in Verdun, Orleans, and Poitiers.

AFRTS always had to deal with host nation sensitivity. It rarely broadcast stories critical of the local government. Nonetheless, the shaky politics in France proved particularly frustrating. The French were sensitive to American comics poking fun at them at a time when the country couldn't seem to govern itself. So, AFRTS reacted. They agreed that network stations would broadcast no negative references about the government. This included a restriction on commentary about France of any kind, even if rebroadcast from an American commercial network. To insure compliance, the French assigned a government official to the network's headquarters.

However, AFN's return to France lasted only nine years. When President de Gaulle withdrew French forces from NATO control in 1967, he expelled all foreign troops stationed in France. With the departure of American Forces required within 2 years, AFN packed up its in 1968 equipment and left. One station stayed with the U.S. contingent at the new NATO headquarters in Belgium.

THE GLORY DAYS OF RADIO

Such problems aside, the period marked the glory days of AFN as a radio network. The draft brought large numbers of experienced radio broadcasters into the service and those who found themselves in Germany made every effort to be transferred into AFN. This gave the network a large cadre of experienced professional broadcasters. Funding also allowed for the maintenance of full-time news bureaus in Paris, London, Bonn and at most network affiliates. Although television led to the

disappearance of most radio entertainment programs on the United States networks, at AFN it created a resurgence of local programming. To supplement the entertainment package from AFRTS, which now contained primarily disc jockey-type shows, AFN increased the production of its own programs.

During the period from 1960-1964, when Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cranston commanded AFN, the network reached its production peak. The network was churning out seventy-five hours of live programming each week. They produced live drama play-by-play sports special extended newscasts, and special events programs such as "Weekend World" and "Tempo."

AFRTS COVERS PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION

The event that probably stands out most during the early '60s was President Kennedy's assassination in November, 1963.

November 22nd had been a slow news day at the Castle. In the newsroom, News Editor David Mynatt was preparing to broadcast "Report from Europe," a roundup of events from around the continent. The quarterly meeting of affiliate program chiefs had just concluded. The Network Program Director, Don Brewer, was hosting a cocktail party for them in the Frankfurt Officers' Club. Cranston drove his car on the Autobahn, stuck in a traffic jam while trying to return to Frankfurt. He'd been at a meeting at USAREUR Headquarters in Heidelberg.

At 7:33 PM, the teletype in the Castle newsroom typed out a message:

"PRECEDE KENNEDY DALLAS, NOV 22 (UPI) - THREE SHOTS WERE FIRED AT PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S MOTORCADE TODAY IN DOWNTOWN DALLAS."

"Music in the Air," then one of AFN's most popular programs, was on the air hosted by Sergeant Lloyd Eyre. In the newsroom, Specialist Four John Grimaldi read the bulletin. Since it contained no word of injuries to members of the motorcade, he decided to stand by for further developments. At 7:39, the teletype began again:

"FLASH FLASH KENNEDY SERIOUSLY WOUNDED PERHAPS FATALLY BY ASSASSIN'S BULLET."

Grimaldi tore off the bulletin and took it to Mynatt. AFN policies have always been very conservative about breaking into programs for news flashes. This was different. Even though a regular newscast would go on the air in just twenty minutes, Mynatt broke into the studio.

"Put me on the air," he told Eyre.

At 7:41 PM, with his voice quivering with emotion, Mynatt told AFN listeners, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we interrupt this program for a special news bulletin.

President Kennedy ... on a visit to Dallas, Texas ... has been reportedly seriously wounded - perhaps fatally. We'll have more as we receive it here at AFN."

This began four days of uninterrupted coverage of the assassination and its aftermath. Newsmen eating dinner at the AFN club heard the announcement on the house speaker and rushed back to the newsroom. Staffers began to mobilize. They called Brewer and the program staff at the Officers Club. Cranston heard the news on his car radio and fought desperately through traffic to get back to Frankfurt.

When a second update came over the teletype, Mynatt again pre-empted the program in progress. He read a report that both Kennedy and Governor Connally had been wounded. At 8:00, Mynatt began the regularly scheduled program. As short bulletins came across the wires, Grimaldi ran them in to Mynatt who interspersed them into the show. By the time he went off the air at 8:15, AFN cancelled all its regular programming. It would not resume its normal schedule until after the President's burial in Arlington Cemetery.

By phone, Cranston ordered up the Atlantic Cable for direct reports from the United States. He instructed the Network to ignore its Midnight sign-off time and to continue broadcasting.

At 8:25, the newsroom received a flash from CBS radio announcing that Kennedy had died. Wilhelm Loehr, the AFN music librarian rushed to the Castle to begin preparing special music programming. The news staff fanned out to gather European reactions for inclusions in the continuous news coverage of the story.

The continuous reporting of Kennedy's assassination confirmed AFN's reputation for fast, accurate and objective handling of news. Several German newspapers criticized the limited coverage which German radio provided for the story. Although AFN's use of the Atlantic Cable cost the U.S. Government four dollars a minute, the network stayed with it providing four days of outstanding coverage. It was worth every dime.

The story proved to be the last major event which AFN broadcast from the Castle. In 1962, the Favbwerke Hoechst, Germany's giant chemical combine, bought the castle from the Von Bruening family. They informed the Bonn Government that Hoechst would like to reclaim it for its own use. Hoechst said they would create a city and company museum. Both Bonn and AFN promptly agreed. While the castle could provide beauty and charm, the AFN staff recognized the advantages of operating from real studios. They needed a building that didn't have creaking floors, wintry drafts and insufficient lavatories.

To replace the castle, Bonn selected a site next door to the extensive Hessischer Rundfunk facilities in Frankfurt.

Among the benefits of the new headquarters, which the German government built, was the AFN staff's ability to develop both personal and professional contacts with their German broadcasting counterparts. In return for the right to reclaim the castle, the Bonn government assumed the \$2.3-million costs of building the new headquarters. To create some highly sophisticated soundproofing, they buried the studios deep inside the core of the building and mounted them on gigantic springs. Individually air-conditioned rooms housed heat-sensitive equipment. The builders bonded and completely grounded all metal used in the construction. They broke ground in 1964 and two years later, AFN moved out of its fourteenth century home and into state-of-the-art facilities. This was an apt reward for two decades of pioneering excellence.

At the opening celebration, speakers suggested that the facilities would be adequate for as long as AFN existed. The prediction proved accurate for only seven years, the period the network remained a radio-only broadcast service. The limited scale of Air Force TV operations in Germany, which had begun in 1957, couldn't provide service to the vast American Forces in Europe. No Army

facility received television until Bad Kreuznach tied into the Air Force system in 1971.

Later that year, Secretary of the Army Robert Froehlke visited Europe. He declared, "The biggest boost to morale in Germany would be to give our troops and their families American television." His statement would set the wheels in motion for television.

The troops would need it.

NOTES - CHAPTER 19

- (1) "Men of the Pueblo," "After Action Report," n.d.[1968].
- (2) "Variety" May 2, 1956, "Billboard" July 22, 1960.
- (3) "USIA, "Listening to Foreign Broadcasts in Six Countries of Western Europe," Research Report No. R-224-64, Washington, 1964.